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ABSTRACT

A study was made to determine the reliability of subjective adult judgement in the selection of films for primary educable mentally handicapped (EMH) children. A selection of five films, all prerated according to standardized techniques and designated appropriate for primary level students, were presented for viewing by a primary class of heterogeneously grouped EMH students. It was expected that the wide range of academic abilities and social maturity would be reflected in the type of response that the class as a whole would make to the films. A situation was therefore created whereby attempts were made to subjectively predict the type of film to which the class would make the most positive response. The quality of response was measured in terms of attending behavior, length and content of the film, and the number of correct answers to the accompanying question set. Observation data revealed that primary EMH students benefitted from exposure to all five films. It was concluded that subjective judgement regarding the educational value of films for heterogeneously grouped EMH students at the primary level tends not to be reliable. (Author)

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A study to determine the reliability of subjective adult judgment in the selection of films for primary EMH students. A selection of five films, all pre-rated according to standardized techniques and designated appropriate for primary level students, were presented for viewing by a primary class of heterogeneously grouped EMH students. It was expected that the wide range in academic abilities and social maturity would be reflected in the type of response that the class as a whole would make to the films. A situation was therefore created whereby attempts were made to subjectively predict the type of film to which the class would make the most positive response. The quality of response was measured in terms of attending behavior, length and content of the film and number of correct answers to the accompanying question set. Observation data revealed that primary EMH students benefitted from exposure to all five films. It was concluded that subjective judgment regarding the educational value of films for heterogeneously grouped EMH students at the primary level tends not to be reliable.

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SPECIAL REPORT No. 743
COMPUTER-BASED PROJECT for the EVALUATION of MEDIA for the HANDICAPPED

Title: SELECTING FILMS FOR PRIMARY EMH CHILDREN

BACKGROUND

The Computer Based Project for the Evaluation of Media for the Handicapped, based on contract #OEC-9-423617-4357 (616) between the Syracuse (N.Y.) City School District and the Media Services and Captioned Films Branch, Bureau of Education for the Handicapped (United States Office of Education) for the five year period July 1, 1969 through June 30, 1974. The major goal is to improve the instruction of handicapped children through the development and use of an evaluation system to measure the instructional effectiveness of films and other materials with educable mentally handicapped (EMH) children, in-service training and media support for special teachers, and studies related to the evaluation process and the populations used.

The Project has concentrated on the 600 films and 200 filmstrips from the Media Services and Captioned Films (BEH - USOE) depository; however, specific packages from Project LIFE, various elementary math curricula, and selected programs from Children's TV Workshop have also been evaluated. The evaluation model used requires that: 1) objectives of materials be specified and written; 2) instruments be constructed to test and measure effectiveness; and, 3) children be the major sources of evaluation information. A number of instruments and methodologies are employed in the gathering of cognitive and affective data from 900 EMH children and 80 special teachers to make the effectiveness decisions. Over half of the EMH population can neither read or write; therefore, a unique Student Response System (SRS) is employed, consisting of a twenty station G.E.-1000 SRS which can be operated in a group or individual recording mode and is connected to a remote computer system. The computer capabilities consist of remote telephone connections to the Rome (N.Y.) Air Development Command, the Honeywell time-shared network, and the Schenectady (N.Y.) G E Research and Development Center; and batch mode capabilities of the Syracuse City Schools, Syracuse University, and various commercial sources.

In-service and media support activities provide on-the-job training for teachers, teacher aides, equipment, and materials to the special teachers in the city schools. The research activities have centered around investigations and special problems related to the development of the evaluation model. The four major areas considered are: 1) testing effects, 2) captioning effects, 3) special student characteristics; and, 4) evaluation procedures validation.

Documentation of the major activities appear in the five annual reports and the 600 evaluations prepared on materials used. Staff members were encouraged to prepare special reports and the attached paper is one of these. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Computer Based Project, the United States Office of Education, or the Syracuse City School District, and no official endorsement by any of the agencies should be inferred.

Observational Report #743
Melvene L. Green
April 10, 1974

SELECTING FILMS FOR PRIMARY EMH CHILDREN

During the past five years, the Computer Based Project has been involved with the development of an evaluation model based on student responses to instructional materials, and the study of the interaction between student characteristics and media characteristics. Data analyses of student and media characteristics and the relationship of student responses to media have been the basis of a number of reports. The subject of this paper is the selection of films for primary educable mentally handicapped (EMH) children. Observations reported are based upon weekly contact with students from one classroom from January to March who had been formally trained to use the student response system (SRS) during the month of October. In working with younger and more heterogeneously grouped students it was observed that a more deliberate effort may be needed in selecting films for their viewing.

The authors of two CBP pilot investigations, (Salon, 1974; Grayson, 1972) have indicated that variables such as length of presentation, color, characteristics of captions, etc. have effects on the attending behavior of viewers, and therefore probably on their cognitive behavior as well. Salon concluded that "... by adapting the materials and items used to the capabilities of the subjects, (i.e., by dealing only with simple and concrete information), primary EMH children can benefit from the content of primary level films with a minimum of assistance."

Recommendations speak to the need for careful consideration of the appropriateness of the film's question format and items. Grayson concluded that "CBP findings on attention seem to indicate that different presentations have different profiles; that younger (6-10 years) EMH children have a greater range of variance in attention than older children; that a relationship exists between high mean attention and content learned; and that media can be grouped and ranked on attention variables." The evidence provided by these studies supports the contention that certain selective criteria must be considered in assigning films for primary EMH students in order to ensure their optimal performance, i.e., measured by attending behavior and cognitive learning. The essential question raised in this study is: To what extent, if at all, subjective adult judgment is reliable in the selection of films for primary EMH students.

METHOD

Subjects. From January-March, a total of five sessions, an attempt was made to estimate the response of one class of students to films selected for their viewing. The assigned films had been rated by project coordinators and considered appropriate for primary students. In light of the heterogeneity of this group, viewed in terms of the students' general academic characteristics, i. e., level of academic maturity and intellectual functioning, it seemed apparent that some films would be more appropriate than others. The range of characteristics and abilities of students in the class are listed in the following table:

TABLE I Range of Student Characteristics

	Lowest	Highest
Chronological Age	5½ yrs.	9 yrs.
Mental Age	2½ yrs.	8 yrs.
I.Q.	59	101
Reading Score	.5	1.2

Film Selection

In a five-week period two films, (A and B), scheduled for viewing by this class were considered by the investigator to be too abstract and above the level of appropriateness for younger primary students. It was anticipated that the students' response to the question sets would be poor. Based upon this subjective speculation another two films (C and D), judged to be more appriate, were substituted. At a later date films A and B were shown to the class and data collected from the assigned question sets. The major criterion used to determine the educational appropriateness of a film was the number of correct responses made by the student to the question set after viewing the film.

The following paragraphs deal with a weekly account of the investigator's experiences in attempting to pre-determine the relative educational value of specific films scheduled for presentation to this class.

REPORT ON WEEKLY FILM SELECTION

Media Number	Order of Presentation
Film C #1004, "Country Mouse and City Mouse"	1st week
Film D #1032, "Summer on the Farm"	2nd week
Film A #2379, "Eating in a Restaurant"	3rd week
Film E #2412, "The Shoemaker and the Elves"	4th week
Film B #2150, "Johnny Appleseed"	5th week

Observations

January 28, 1974, film A, originally scheduled for viewing, was replaced by film C. This substitution was made after film A had been previewed and considered of probable high interest appeal, but too lengthy, (15 minutes) to hold the attention of primary EMH students. A further deterrent was the rather long gaps in the monologue to allow deaf children the time and opportunity to read lips. It was felt that these periods of delay would be too distracting for young EMH students who could not read the captions on the picture. The students seemed to enjoy film C and the attending behavior was relatively high; the mean percent of primary students watching this film was approximately 82. The teacher indicated on a checklist that the vocabulary was above the level of the class, but that the concept and question levels were about right. Seven questions were presented to the class. Of ten pupils, five answered from 60-100% of the items correctly. The remaining five students answered 50% or less of the items correctly.

February 6, 1974, as was the case the previous week, the film originally scheduled for viewing was substituted in favor of a shorter

film; one with a more "simple" story line and vocabulary. In view of the general level of functioning of this class, film B was considered to be too lengthy (14 minutes) to hold the attention of the majority of students. Moreover, it was felt that vocabulary and concepts were relatively abstract, i.e., pioneer, settlement, transplant, seedling, etc. The following comment about the film is noted in the Berkeley Edition of the Lesson Guide, p. 29 "... it is basically an intermediate social studies film, but could be used to enrich studies of language arts and American literature."

Film D was presented to the class as a substitute for film B. The mean percentage of primary students watching this film was approximately 85. The teacher feedback indicated that the vocabulary was above the level of appropriateness, but that the concept level was about right. Response to the question set containing both pre and posttest questions was relatively good. Four pupils answered 70-90% of the twelve questions correctly. Five pupils answered 50% or less of the questions correctly.

February 13, 1974, in view of the overall response to film A and its corresponding question set there would appear to have been no reason not to show this film as previously scheduled. The attending behavior was good, the mean percentage of primary students watching being about 84. The teacher felt that the vocabulary, concepts and questions were appropriate. Data analysis revealed that these primary students did relatively well on the question set. For example, three students answered 60-70% of the questions correctly. Two students answered 50% of the questions correctly while the remaining five students answered less than 50% of the questions correctly.

February 27, 1974, film E, the assigned film was viewed as scheduled. The mean percentage of primary students watching this film was approximately 85. The length of the film (13 minutes) appeared not to deter the level of interest, although toward the end the children began to squirm in their seats. Data analysis revealed that three students answered 80-90% of the items correctly. Three students answered 50% of the items correctly, and four pupils answered less than 50% of the items correctly.

March 13, 1974, film B was not shown when originally scheduled because it was anticipated that these primary students would not be able to follow the plot or respond well to the question set. Data analysis, however, revealed that primary students responded as well as intermediate students to the question set, and that the mean percentage of primary students watching this film was 85 as compared to a mean percentage of 95 for intermediate students. The primary classroom teacher felt that the vocabulary, concepts and questions were above the level of appropriateness for the class.

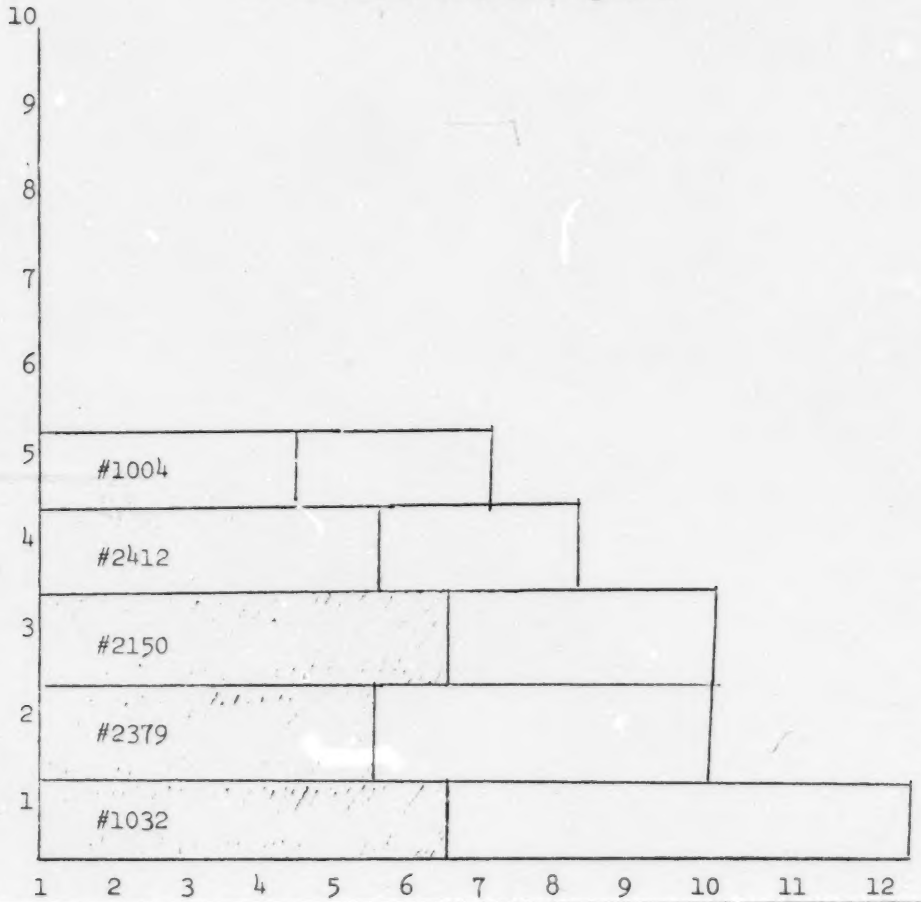
The general response of students in this primary class to the question set was not as good when compared to previous films, i.e., film A or film D. Three students answered 80% of the questions correctly. One student answered 50% of the questions and six students answered less than 50% of the questions correctly. The number of correct responses to this as compared to other question sets would appear to reflect and to support the fact that the range of abilities within the class is very broad (see Table I).

RESULTS

The following table depicts the relative response of students to the question sets of all five films. This data indicates that the level of performance regarding these films was approximately the same, and that the level of response among the ten students vis a vis each film remained relatively constant.

TABLE 2

Number of Students Recording
At Least 50% Correct Response.



Of the five films discussed in this report, serious question was raised about two, films A and B. Film A was initially rejected because it was considered too long and its delayed monologue a source of distraction for primary level EMH students. Film B was initially rejected because it was considered that th biographical sketch was too long and abstract in terms of the general story content, concept and vocabulary levels. Both films were, however, shown to the class at a later date to determine what type of response the students would actually make. The findings revealed that these students made as positive a response to films A and B as they did to films C, D and E. In fact, student response to the question sets of films A and D was slightly better than for the other three films.

SUMMARY

Special attention has been given to the kinds of films presented to a class of primary EMH students. Attention was particularly paid to the films' content, length and to the question set, and an attempt made to subjectively predict the type of films to which the students would make the most positive response. The assumption was that films of a particular length and abstractness of content and dialogue would be too difficult for this particular group of primary EMH students to benefit from, i.e., measured in terms of attending behavior and the number of correct responses to the question set. Contrary to expectation, there is no question but that these students benefitted from exposure to all five films. The author therefore concludes that it is extremely difficult to subjectively pre-determine the educational value of media for heterogeneously grouped EMH students on the primary level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In selecting films to be viewed by primary EMH classes whose populations are mixed, it is recommended that:

1. The composition of the class, i.e., range of abilities and performance levels of students, be taken into consideration.
2. Consideration be given to the format, concept and vocabulary levels of the films and question sets.
3. Teachers not attempt to select films based solely upon their own subjective judgments.
4. Teachers be consciously aware that adults tend to underestimate rather than overestimate the learning potential and interest level of children of all ages.

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